Applications are up and some city colleges are seeing record enrollment

Jeff A. Chamer
Telegram & Gazette

Worcester colleges have returned to more traditional methods of student recruitment, such as campus tours or on-the-spot admissions events, rather than drive-thru tours and virtual workshops, as COVID-19 restrictions have eased.

For most, the return has paid off in spades. Not only have applications increased at most schools in the area, some are reporting record enrollment numbers.

These numbers come against the backdrop of declining enrollment at undergraduate programs across the state, a trend that has been ongoing for almost 10 years.

According to a report published by the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education this year, the number of undergraduate students enrolled in state colleges has been declining since fall 2014.

At its peak in fall 2013, the number of undergraduate students enrolled in Massachusetts colleges was 196,847. That number declined to 153,929 as of fall 2021.

There was a steep decline between fall 2019 and fall 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. In fall 2019, the number of undergraduate students enrolled was 172,568, whereas by fall 2020, the number had fallen to 160,595.

In a reversal, some universities in Worcester have experienced their largest incoming classes in their respective histories.
The College of the Holy Cross had 904 students enrolling this fall, up from 821 the previous year.

Clark University experienced its largest incoming class of first-year students this fall at 705.

"Two things really propelled us forward this year — a return to more normal recruitment conditions including in-person on-campus events; college fairs and so on, and the addition of the Becker School of Design & Technology at Clark," said Meredith Twombly, vice president for admission and financial aid.

For some schools, like Assumption University, while the increase in applications was small — 4,037 in fall 2022 compared to 4,018 in fall 2021 — the ability to host campus events and tours is important.

Since other schools have "slightly better brand recognition," Assumption depends on drawing students to its campus for events and tours to increase the likelihood of them applying, said Bill Boffi, vice president of enrollment engagement.

"If students don't visit, they may apply anywhere, whereas, for us ... if they come to visit, they are much more likely to apply," he said.

Some schools are still finalizing application and enrollment numbers as they either have rolling admissions, such as Quinsigamond Community College and Mount Wachusett Community College, or their deadline runs until the end of September, such as Worcester State University.

Fitchburg State University and the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences could not be reached for comment.

Colleges in Worcester provided their application numbers from fall 2021 and fall 2022.
Anna Maria College

Applications for fall 2022 were up over 34.5% compared to fall 2021. The college received 3,900 applications this fall compared to 2,865 last fall.

"We experienced 43% growth in several core academic programs: Business, criminal justice, health science, nursing, social work and psychology," said John Hamel, vice president for enrollment.

Hamel said there were increases in student-athlete applications at over 30%, Worcester County applications up over 10% and out-of-state applications up over 20%.

The college also saw an increase in international applications as COVID-19 restrictions relaxed, going from 335 in fall 2021 to 812 in fall 2022.

Assumption University

Assumption University saw a small increase in applications from 4,018 in fall 2021 to 4,037 in fall 2022.

Boffi said that the ability to host families and students for tours and admissions events on campus again after COVID-19 restrictions put a pause on those activities, helped lead to the small increase this fall.

He said that the university is still waiting for the "dust to settle" regarding the final enrollment numbers, but that both fall 2021 and 2022 are both down compared to fall 2020, during which, "we had a really strong recruitment."

Boffi, who was brought in to help increase the university's enrollment over the next few years, said they have an enrollment plan, that looks at some of the challenges the university is experiencing, as well as opportunities to increase enrollment over "the next couple of cycles."
Some of these opportunities include community and alumni engagement events, expanding academic and athletic opportunities, as well as hosting more recruitment and admissions events like the Fast Track to the Pack event the university hosted in August.

"For students right before they start their senior year, we interviewed every single student about their motivation to succeed in college and to come to Assumption and most of the students who were with us that day left with an official acceptance to the university, which is, in every single case, their first," Boffi said.

**Clark University**

First year applications were up 8% for fall 2022, with 8,814 applications compared to 8,179 in fall 2021, Twombly said.

"Our first-year class is our largest ever as is our total fall enrollment," Twombly said. "We are expecting a total of about 763 new undergraduate students — 705 first-year and 58 transfer students, bringing total undergraduate enrollment to approximately 2,350."

When Becker College shut down, Clark leased some of the former school's Worcester campus buildings and took over its nationally ranked video game design programs. Additionally, some former Becker students and staff also moved over to Clark.

"So far, 90 new incoming students have expressed an interest in interactive media design," Twombly said. "By all measures this was an exceptionally successful admissions cycle for Clark."

**College of the Holy Cross**
There was an increase across in the number of applications and students enrolled at the College of the Holy Cross in the number of applications, students who enrolled between fall 2021 and fall 2022. The university saw a decrease in the number of students admitted between the two years.

In fall 2021, 6,498 students applied, with 2,786 being admitted and 821 chose to enroll. For fall 2021, the university saw 7,035 applications, 2,558 students admitted and 904 who chose to enroll.

"There was a great deal of interest and excitement surrounding President Rougeau, newer facilities such as the Prior Performing Arts Center and the Joanne Chouinard-Luth Recreation and Wellness Center," said Cornell B. LeSane, vice president for enrollment management. "That coupled with the ability for prospective students and families to visit our beautiful campus once again all had a positive impact on the success we achieved this year."

Despite the number of admits decreasing, the college welcomed its largest incoming class this fall.

**Nichols College**

Nichols College Vice President of Enrollment Management Michael Crowley said the school saw its highest number of applications in the "past few years," with 2,551 this fall. An increase, he said, of 11%.

"In alignment with President Glenn Sulmasy's vision, we increased our women in the entering class by 10% — which in and of itself is terrific,' he said. "We're looking forward to building on this momentum with the Class of 2027."

**UMass Chan**
UMass Chan is divided into the Tan Chingfen Graduate School of Nursing, T.H. Chan School of Medicine and Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences.

The nursing school saw an increase in both applicants and number of students enrolled between fall 2021 and fall 2022. The number of applications rose from 232 in fall 2021 to 233 in fall 2022, while the number of enrolled — 81 in fall 2021 — also rose to 87 in fall 2022.

The medical school also experienced an increase in both applicants and enrolled, going from 5,176 applications and 162 enrolled in fall 2021, to 5,392 applicants and 175 enrolled in fall 2022.

"This fall the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences matriculated its largest class in more than a decade from an impressively talented and highly qualified pool of applicants," said Mary Ellen Lane, dean of the biomedical sciences program.

The program saw the number of applicants drop from 465 in fall 2021, to 322 in fall 2022. However, the number of enrolled students increased from 71 in fall 2021 to 87 in fall 2022.

"We have been pleased to see an increasingly diverse domestic and international number of students seeking to pursue a Ph.D. in biomedical science, attributable in part to exemplary student support services and strong relationships with undergraduate institutions," she said. "The fact that the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences at UMass Chan exceeded its enrollment target with a smaller applicant pool this year suggests our efforts are resonating with talented future scientists."

Worcester Polytechnic Institute
WPI saw about a 5.3% increase in the number of applications, going from 11,092 to 11,700 between fall 2021 and fall 2022. A spokesperson for the university was unavailable to comment.

**Worcester State University**

While Worcester State University provided application numbers for fall 2022, the numbers are incomplete as the university accepts applications throughout September.

However, comparing the numbers as of August 2022 to August 2021, the university has an increase in the number of new student applications and new student acceptances.

By August 2022, the university received 5,842 new student applications for the fall 2022 semester, while they received 4,837 for fall 2021. New student acceptances also increased from 3,762 for fall 2021, to 4,687 for fall 2022.

The number of new student enrollees is lower for fall 2022, with 1,119, compared to 1,143 for fall 2021, but the fall 2021 included 140 enrollees from Becker College and the university is still accepting applications, meaning that the number could be different when the university stops accepting applications in September.